

BOOKS

"Debate on the accuracy and adequacy of the Warren Commission's work," *The New York Times* editorialized sourly in September 1966, "is now approaching the dimensions of a lively small industry in this country." The first wave of "revisionist" books brought Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment* to the top of the best-seller lists and seriously shook much of the American public's confidence in the findings of the Warren Commission. Defenders of the Commission quickly counterattacked, reaffirming the official version of the assassination and dismissing its critics as moneygrubbing publicity hounds. The counter-counterattack is now under way, with a barrage of new books blasting the Warren Commission, its defenders and its apologists. Their tone and quality are uneven, ranging from strident and sparsely documented polemics to sober and scrupulously researched studies of the Commission's evidence. A few build a disturbingly persuasive case against the Warren Report and deserve serious attention.

The best of the new crop of books—and the most chilling in its implications—is Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* (Bobbs-Merrill), a comprehensive and exhaustively researched analysis of the Warren Report and its 26 volumes of supplementary evidence. "The central purpose of my book," writes Mrs. Meagher (a World Health Organization consultant who in 1966 privately published a 150-page "Subject Index" to the Warren Report), "is, by citing the actual evidence from the Hearings and Exhibits, to prove (1) that Oswald, far from being a lone assassin, may well be innocent of any implication in the crimes of which he has been accused; (2) that there were two or more assassins; and (3) that the Warren Report is a travesty of fact and mockery of justice, consciously

assassination." Mrs. Meagher amasses an impressive array of evidence in support of her contentions, to the considerable discomfiture of any reader not congenitally prone to conspiratorial theories of history. Her scholarship, perception and grasp of the intricacies of the Commission's evidence make *Accessories After the Fact* the definitive work to date on the assassination. There may be answers to all the grave charges in her massive indictment; but until they are presented, *Accessories After the Fact* will stand as a modern *J'Accuse*.

Another responsible researcher, in a field too often—and too hastily—discredited by the sensationalism of a few "literary scavengers," Harold Weisberg has been as prolific as he is meticulous in investigating the assassination. Forced to publish his own books at considerable expense, Weisberg has followed his earlier assassination volumes—*Whitewash*, *Whitewash II* and *Photographic Whitewash*—with a carefully documented new examination of the Garrison investigation, *Oswald in New Orleans*, subtitled "Case for Conspiracy with the CIA." Always a painstakingly accurate and assiduous—if less than impartial—researcher, Weisberg brings these talents to bear with considerable success in his latest effort. He contends that Oswald was involved with the late David Ferrie, anti-Castro Cuban exiles and elements of the CIA in a well-organized and ultimately successful conspiracy to kill the President. It's his conclusion, buttressed by a hefty array of evidence, "that the CIA and its involvement in the assassination were whitewashed" by the Warren Commission. On all major points, Weisberg supports the thesis of District Attorney Jim Garrison; and, along with Garrison's own case, his book will stand or fall with Clay Shaw in the courts. He does not pretend to be objective, but he never stretches or manipulates the facts; his research, particularly in the area of the so-called "second Oswald" and Oswald's ties to right-wing anti-Castro exile groups, is significant—and unsettling—in view of the Warren Report's failure to unearth any such associations. *Oswald in New Orleans* is read by the uncommitted reader with the hope that Weisberg is wrong—and the lingering fear that he isn't.

Yet another new dimension of the assassination is examined in Josiah Thompson's *Six Seconds in Dallas* (Geis). Thompson, a philosophy professor at Haverford College who served as a consultant for *Life* magazine's team investigating the assassination, has closely scrutinized the photographic evidence taken at the assassination site on November 22, particularly the famous Zapruder film of the shooting. On the basis of a detailed examination of the films and photographs, some of which Thompson

reproduces for the first time, he surmises that Kennedy was killed by three assassins, firing both in front of and in back of the Presidential limousine. Thompson's most significant original contributions are his detailed reconstruction of the sequence of shots—contradicting that of the Commission—and his mathematical research on the acceleration curves and impact phenomena of the bullets that struck Kennedy. Through intensive study of the Zapruder films and other relevant photographic evidence Thompson concludes that the President was hit simultaneously by two "bunched" shots—one bullet striking his back and inflicting a nonfatal wound and a second, fatal bullet striking the front of his head. Detailed photographic analysis, he contends, makes it clear that the President's body was snapped forward under the impact of the first bullet that hit his back and fractions of a second later was slammed back and leftward by the second bullet, which blew off the top of his skull and killed him. A single assassin could not, obviously, have fired both bullets. Thompson's study is a sober and scholarly one, and his conclusion that Oswald did not act alone—if, indeed, he acted at all—is difficult to contest. The most unsettling aspect of both *Six Seconds in Dallas* and Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* is the failure of the Warren Commission to investigate, evaluate—or often even acknowledge—the huge body of evidence in its possession indicating the possible presence of more than one gunman in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963. Whatever the reason for its errors of omission and commission—subterfuge, carelessness, time pressures or simply a prejudgmental assumption of Oswald's lone guilt—these new books lend weight to widening appeals by Congressmen and the press for an independent new investigation of President Kennedy's assassination. Though the evidence would seem to indicate otherwise, such an investigation could conceivably vindicate the Warren Commission and silence the critics forever; but until it is conducted, the circumstances of the President's death will be the subject of many more books—and many more fears.